

ARMED TO THE TEETH

By giving problematic teeth a new lease on life, veneers offer a potentially complete smile makeover

Words • Jordan Mari S. De Leon

Admit it or not, we all desire a Hollywood smile—one with flawlessly white and perfectly aligned teeth that instantly lights up a room, graces the covers of magazines, and attracts attention in red-carpet premieres. After all, a million-dollar smile is important not only in maintaining good looks, but also as an effective tool in nailing a dream job, wooing a potential client, impressing a date, or landing a promotion.

But while anyone would like to have a dazzling, perfect smile, a variety of factors can affect how our teeth look. Smoking and drinking coffee or soda, among others, can stain the teeth and make it look discolored and dull despite constant oral care. Genetics may also play a role, as some people grow up having unequally aligned teeth and uneven spaces, making them unable to project that winning smile.

Thankfully, technological advancements have given dentists more ways to not only effectively restore teeth to its former glory, but also to improve its overall aesthetics and give us that dreamy smile we have always desired. One such technology is a veneer, which is a thin layer of restorative material placed over a tooth.

Veneer basics

Dr. Carlo Pio Tripon, a renowned cosmetic and micro dentist, installs veneers at his Tripon Dental Center, one of the leading dental clinics in the country.

He says that veneers are essentially like false fingernails that are strongly bonded to the fronts of the teeth. It can be composed of either porcelain or composite.

Porcelain is the strongest, top-of-the line, most beautiful, and most stain-resistant material. On the other hand, composite is a “compromise” affordable material that looks good aesthetically, but can easily break down and wear off compared to porcelain.

Dr. Tripon adds that unlike crowns, which completely envelop the tooth and require more reduction of tooth structure, veneers usually cover just the faces of the teeth and, sometimes, part of the cutting edge and sides.

In general, veneers are used to treat a wide range of dental problems quickly and easily where other treatments have failed. These conditions include stained teeth, damaged or chipped teeth, gaps between teeth, crooked teeth, and eroded teeth. However, more and more people have been getting veneers mainly to improve their overall look.

Smile makeover

Installing veneers can either be a simple or complex procedure depending on the status of one's teeth and how a patient would like his teeth to look like.

“The first and most difficult part of a smile makeover with veneers is to plan out and determine the most ideal smile of each patient. This would entail a thorough interview of a patient's like and dislikes,



COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Veneers not only have an impact on one's good looks, but also on one's social standing. Dr. Tripon outlines the benefits of a smile makeover using veneers (which start at PHP 7000 per tooth) on each social and age group:

<19 LATE TEENAGERS AND UNDER

Veneers are generally not recommended for very young patients because the pulp tissue—the chamber inside every tooth that houses the nerves and blood supply—is still very big. But for young patients who have serious dental problems (such as poorly maintained braces and congenitally missing teeth), a direct composite veneer, which requires very minimal tooth reduction, is an effective treatment, not to mention a confidence booster in school.

<30 YOUNG ADULTS, SINGLES, AND YUPPIES

A smile makeover can be a very effective tool in the highly competitive job market environment. Rightly or wrongly, an important qualification when looking for a job is not just the contents of a resume, but the good looks of the job applicant, as well. “As shown in a the study of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, when you have a beautiful smile, people will perceive you as smarter, more successful, and more talented,” says Dr. Tripon. A sexy smile certainly doesn't hurt either when trying to attract the opposite sex.

>30 UPPER MANAGEMENT, POWER PLAYERS, THE RICH, AND THE FAMOUS

“Once one achieves the level of the upper echelons of society, it is almost inexcusable to have ugly teeth,” says Dr. Tripon. As a leader, people look up to them and pay attention to every detail—including their teeth. Having veneers installed can leave a very good impression when going toe-to-toe with important stockholders, VIPs, socialites, CEOs, and the like. As unfair as it may seem, the first impression that people give is based on how we look, more than the first thing we say, says Dr. Tripon. Getting a smile makeover with veneers can be a smart step in leaving a lasting impression on other people.



After veneers, teeth are more consistent in texture and have better shape, explains Dr. Carlo Pio Tripon

VENEER CARE

- 1 Teeth with veneers should be treated like any ordinary teeth.
- 2 Brush and floss your teeth regularly as you can still get gum disease and cavities even with veneers installed.
- 3 Consider undergoing a lifestyle change such as decreasing consumption of sodas, coffee, and other substances that can harm the teeth. Do not chew ice or hard candy.
- 4 If you grind your teeth at night, have it treated, as this may cause damage to the veneers.
- 5 Always go to your regular dental checkup every six months to have the veneers examined and cleaned.

and what they want their smile to look like,” explains Dr. Tripon.

One of Dr. Tripon’s techniques to effectively determine the best smile makeover for a patient is to carefully observe him or her during the interview. He would look at a patient’s teeth during the conversation and observe its alignment, symmetry, smile, and bite, among others. This helps him greatly in giving recommendations to patients on the best type of smile makeover suited for them.

After the interview with the patient, Dr. Tripon would need to analyze if he can meet the patient’s expectations and decide how many teeth should be involved.

“Under local anesthetic, I trim away only sufficient tooth structure for the planned veneers, and then take photos and measurements of the teeth,” he explains. He also adds that the patients also have a hand in choosing the best shade of veneers suited for them, but with recommendations from him.

The patient would then be sent home with temporary veneers. Dr. Tripon then has his clinic build the actual veneers for the patient based on the information he gathered from the interview and, most of the time, based on the patient’s specifics. After a few days, the patient comes back so that the newly made veneers can be bonded with his teeth.

Another appointment or two at the clinic may be necessary afterwards to adjust the bite or smile, depending on the client’s particular taste.

For most patients, the end result of having a veneer installed is not only perfectly aligned and sparkling white teeth, but also a winning, beautiful smile.

Aesthetics and symmetry

While veneers are generally used to improve both the teeth’s aesthetics and health, the type of veneers to be installed varies greatly from one patient to another.



ARE VENEERS THE BEST ?

While installing veneers is generally a quick and easy procedure, there are also other dental procedures that, despite taking months or years to take full effect, ensure the health and aesthetics of one's teeth. These include orthodontic methods such as braces and other cosmetic dental procedures like tooth bleaching or tooth whitening. How do veneers compare to each of these dental procedures?

VENEERS VS. ORTHODONTICS

According to Dr. Carlo Pio Tripon of Tripon Dental Center, orthodontics is recommended if one's teeth are fairly ideal in size, shape, and color.

"It is more recommended for people who have the patience for regular adjustments by the orthodontist. Braces are also ideal for younger patients, since orthodontic results are more stable if started at an ideal age," he explains.

Among adults, however, braces can be very time consuming and can have varying degrees of pain and discomfort, which could discourage patients from going back to the orthodontist or from continuing their braces. So for people who want a quicker smile makeover, veneers are the way to go.

VENEERS VS. TOOTH WHITENING

Dr. Tripon explains that tooth bleaching is ideal for people who are fairly happy with how their teeth look like, but find them too yellowish or dark. He adds that since tooth whitening is not permanent, one will have to re-whiten after it wears off.

He further explains that bleaching works best with yellowish or reddish-yellowish teeth and is not as effective with tetracycline-stained teeth (discolored by the antibiotic) and gray teeth.

"One advantage of bleaching is that it will give you an idea of how white you would like your teeth to look. It can help you decide whether or not to pursue a more permanent change with veneers," Dr. Tripon says.

"Though the technical aspect is important, the artistic aspect is the key to make a veneer perfectly fit a patient's profile. Every smile design is different for each individual, so a good dentist has to know exactly what makeover is suited for a patient," says Dr. Tripon.

He emphasizes that, in order to have a perfect smile, the teeth should always be symmetrical and in proportion to the shape of one's face—one of his important guidelines when fitting the veneers on a patient's teeth.

"For example, if your face is more square-shaped, then your teeth should be square-shaped as well. If your face is oval, then your teeth have to be oval. Otherwise your smile would appear less than perfect," Dr. Tripon explains.

Aside from symmetry and proportion, he notes that human tastes also play a role in determining the shade of the veneer. For example, some patients want the shade of their veneers to be as natural as possible so that people would not notice any change in their teeth at all. On the other hand, Dr. Tripon explains that other patients want to announce to the whole world that they had a smile makeover.

"Although, in general, the patient has a relatively free hand in choosing what type of veneer he wants installed, he or she must be made to understand that there are many parameters and factors to consider when going through a smile makeover—whether it's a sexy smile, a powerful smile, or a simple yet attention-grabbing smile. This helps in creating a new smile that would not only make the patient look good, but also feel good about himself or herself," he says. ▮

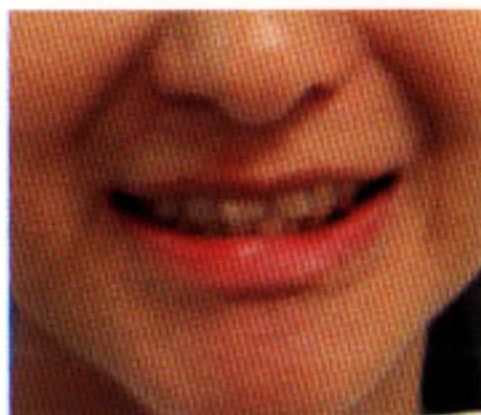
BEFORE & AFTER



BEFORE: The patient's teeth were too small and didn't match the patient's oval face, making her look chubby.



AFTER: All the patient's teeth looked proportional and matched her face shape. Visibly whiter teeth made her smile stand out more.



BEFORE: The patient had small teeth and crooked two front teeth, making her smile look childlike.



AFTER: The patient had longer teeth that helped lengthen the impression of her face and make her look more sophisticated.



BEFORE: The patient had stained teeth that made her look unhealthy.



AFTER: With noticeably whiter teeth, her smile is livelier and healthy-looking.

STRAIGHT AWAY



Wires, metal, and brackets used to be the only way to straighten the teeth. Not only do these braces announce to the world that you've had a trip to the orthodontist, but conventional braces are unsightly, uncomfortable, and inconvenient. It's difficult to maintain good oral hygiene with an unwieldy object fixed to your teeth for such a long period.

But recent developments in orthodontic treatments have successfully created removable appliances to treat dental discrepancies such as crowding, crookedness, overbite, openbite, and deepbite. One of these is Invisalign, which uses a series of clear, removable, nearly invisible, plastic appliances called aligners.

Because these invisible braces are removable, you can eat your favorite food without having to fuss over pieces that get stuck in between the teeth. You can brush and floss normally so

your gums and teeth remain healthy. Invisalign uses 3-D imaging software technology to help create a customized program and model for your teeth.

Once your Invisalign-certified dentist or orthodontist creates your orthodontic records based on the condition of your teeth, he sends it to Align Technology in the U.S., which in turn renders the doctor's treatment plan in a graphical 3-D movie. It will show how the patient's teeth will move from its current position to its final desired position.

Based on this projection, a corresponding clear, plastic aligner is created for each stage of the tooth movement. The patient wears an aligner for approximately two weeks before switching to the next set in the series. The patient's teeth are straightened millimeter by millimeter every week. Before you know it, your teeth are perfectly aligned. Best of all, they were done discreetly.